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REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS

SECURITY COUNCIL
Forty-seventh year

Letter dated 6 November 1992 from the Permanent Representative of Croatia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to enclose herewith a letter dated 6 November 1992 addressed to you by Mr. Hrvoje Sarinić, Prime Minister of Croatia (see annex).

We would request that the text of the present letter and its annex be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 96, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Dr. Mario NOBILO
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

ANNEX

Letter dated 6 November 1992 from the Prime Minister of Croatia to the Secretary-General

On behalf of the Croatian Government, I should like to take this opportunity to inform you about the humanitarian problems the Republic of Croatia is facing in the biggest refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War.

As you have been continuously informed about the tragic situation we are facing, as well as about its background and causes, I should like briefly to point out some important aspects and ask for additional international support in solving some very important and urgent problems.

At this very moment the Republic of Croatia is providing care for 265,000 displaced persons from Croatia (mostly from "pink zones" and United Nations protected areas), for about 35,000 refugees from Serbia (mainly Croats from Voivodina and Kosovo) and for more than 450,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina (370,000 registered and 70,000-80,000 non-registered). Accordingly, the 4.7 million inhabitants of the Republic of Croatia have given shelter to a total of more than 750,000 displaced persons and refugees. To illustrate the situation, this would be as if Italy were to take care of 7 million or Germany of 10 million or the United States of America of 30 million refugees and displaced persons. The number of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina alone is approximately three times the total in all other European countries. Besides, about 70,000-80,000 refugees from Croatia are still abroad, mainly in Hungary, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia.

With full respect for international humanitarian law and principles of human rights, the Republic of Croatia, far beyond its capacities, has given shelter to such a large number of displaced persons and refugees. At present, the Republic of Croatia is faced with the following problems:

1. The Republic of Croatia has no more free accommodation facilities to give shelter to new refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina, who constantly seek asylum. Moreover, approximately 70,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina are accommodated in conditions not appropriate for the coming winter.

2. The Republic of Croatia has received a considerable amount of humanitarian assistance in the form of food, medicine, hygienic supplies, clothes and so on. But the costs of taking care of such a large number of displaced persons and refugees that we have to pay directly amount to approximately US$ 100 million per month, which considerably influences the inflation rate in Croatia. To cover these costs Croatia has several times asked the international community to help, but practically no direct financial support has been received so far.

3. At present, we are facing a very complex economic and social situation in the Republic of Croatia. The inflation rate during the last month is estimated to be above 30 per cent. At this moment Croatia has 700,000 retired and 275,000 unemployed people, in addition to the previously mentioned 750,000 displaced persons and refugees. There are increasing social tensions that are easily discernible in the relationship between the local Croatian population and refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Here, I wish to point out that the majority of the refugees are accommodated in private families to whom as yet no financial support has been given to cover their additional living costs. The Government of the Republic of Croatia has no possibility of giving them any direct financial support and that brings us to the question how long they will be able to give shelter to the refugees.

4. An additional reason for increasing social tensions in my country is the impossibility for displaced persons to return to their homes in the "pink zones" and United Nations protected areas. Besides the insufficient speed and efficiency in carrying out the Cyrus Vance plan, the high level of destruction in the return areas represents an additional problem that has to be solved.

Considering that the current economic and social situation in Croatia is highly complex, that it is constantly deteriorating and thus pushing us to the limits of social and economic stability, the Government of the Republic of Croatia has been forced to adopt new measures for solving the ongoing refugee crisis in Croatia, which include improved control of the border between Croatia and the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, without however violating basic international humanitarian law. That means that borders are still open, but controlled. The number of refugees crossing the Croatian border per day ranges between 300 and 400 people. For example, several thousands of ex-detainees from Bosnia and Herzegovina arrived at a temporary transit centre in Karlovac, organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross, in cooperation with the Croatian Government. Also, after the occupation of Bosanski Brod, approximately 10,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina were given asylum in Croatia. Because of recent events in the region of Jajce a flow of refugees moved towards Herzegovina. The Government of Croatia has sent its representatives to help alleviate the sufferings of these people in cooperation with the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

At this moment the building of refugee camps in safe areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina for all potential new refugees arriving from Bosnia and Herzegovina is, according to the Croatian Government, the best possible solution. In this respect, the Government of Croatia will be helpful in providing logistic and humanitarian support so that these centres may be organized as soon as possible.

At this very moment the Government of Croatia is concerned on the highest priority level with the return of displaced persons and refugees to their homes. This primarily relates to the return of displaced persons and refugees from Croatia, 90 per cent of whom are from "pink zones" and United Nations

protected areas. Accordingly, in the first phase return should be organized to all areas of "pink zones" as well as selective return to United Nations protected areas (i.e. first, to places in which Croats and Hungarians comprise the majority of the population). The return should start in the east and west sectors followed by the north and south sectors.

It is expected that through the return process of our displaced persons additional accommodation capacities will be available for refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina who are now settled in conditions not appropriate for the winter season. To accommodate other refugees who are now inadequately accommodated in Croatia, the Croatian Government, through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, will ask neighbouring countries to provide suitable accommodation for these refugees during the winter period only.

The Republic of Croatia is appealing once more for direct financial support from the international community by which it will be able to cover direct accommodation costs of foreign refugees in Croatia. As an example, Croatia is forced to buy oil abroad in order to produce enough electric power for the heating of a large number of places where these refugees are accommodated. In order to provide financial help for the families who have given shelter to refugees the Croatian Government is requesting immediate financial support from the international community - primarily from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the European Communities.

Finally, I should like to draw your attention to the possibly very difficult consequences, the result of inadequate and insufficiently fast intervention to solve the most complex refugee crisis in Europe between the end of the Second World War and today. Precisely, due to the increasing aggression in Bosnia and Herzegovina the number of newly arriving refugees may amount, in a very short period, according to the worst possible estimations, to a grand total of 500,000 refugees. To conclude, there is a great danger that an increasing number of new asylum seekers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, in addition to refugees already accommodated in Croatia, could spread throughout the whole of Europe.

(Signed) Hrvoje ŠARINIĆ
Prime Minister